Mass Media and Reality Construction Process in System Theory and Differentiation

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ABSTRACT

The mass media itself is referred to as "media" because of its nature as a medium/intermediary. For the discipline of Communication Science, the media (as a medium) is one of the factors forming the communication process. Whereas mass media, in general knowledge, is more defined in institutions/organizations/media companies that produce information in the form of commodities traded, called mass media because the process seeks to direct the results of its production to the widest possible audience. Reality construction is the process by which mass media create information products before they are accepted by the public. Construction of reality is more defined as an effort to compile the reality of one or many events that were originally fragmented (random) to be systematic to form a meaningful story or discourse. This article attempts to read the process of constructing reality with the perspective of System Theory and Differentiation from Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann sees through these two perspectives that people get reality from the mass media as the second form of reality that occurs because the first reality obtained by the mass media experiences the construction of reality when it enters the mass media area. The basis for the construction of reality in the mass media is the existence of self-references and other references present in the mass media system. The mass media system distinguishes self-references and other references in themselves in the form of the construction of reality or the results of information distributed to the public.

Keywords: Mass Media, Construction of Reality, Niklas Luhmann, Systems Theory, Differentiation

1. INTRODUCTION

The mass media is now better known as a part of human life which is the basis of the necessities of life. Mass media is needed by humans in obtaining information and as a guide for human behavior toward an event that occurs in their environment. As a basic human need, the mass media practically has space in the human mind as a source that is not questioned for the truth that is given. This is where many conjectures, as well as questions, occur within the scope of the mass media and individuals, for example, why do humans place their trust in the acquisition of information from the mass media? Or, how true is the information displayed in the mass media?

The question above is just an illustration of the condition of how humans should pay attention and (if possible) criticize the mass media in presenting information which is the activity and function of the mass media itself. As social beings, the need for information is

a basic human substance that is believed to be able to influence their daily lives. But if the mass media as a source of information "still" has its practices in disseminating information, then humans as consumers of that information need to know the reality that is happening within the mass media.

The mass media operating under a business and economic orientation will run like any other business industry, there will be calculations regarding profits and losses, income expenses, and so on. As an industry that sells information to the public, it is very clear that the information that is disseminated certainly has a high selling value to the market. The market here is more defined as the mass media market, where producers are the mass media and consumers are the public which is usually referred to as the audience.

The mass media strategy in selling information that is considered profitable certainly has the construction (making) of that information. Information taken from this

broad reality – the environment – will undergo construction so that the information conveyed to the public is not in the form of a reality that is the same as what is happening in that environment. Reality construction is more interpreted as an effort to compose reality from one or many events which were originally fragmented (random) to become systematic to form a meaningful story or discourse. It is in this section that the individual's awareness as an audience and social being is questioned, to what extent is knowledge of the construction of reality understood by individuals to avoid misunderstanding information and obtain true information as reality occurs?

This paper departs from the fact that there are mass media practices that construct this reality. Reading and knowledge of the construction of reality in the mass media will be reviewed from systems theory in sociological studies. The mass media is considered a system and has its way of working. The next three sub-chapters in this paper will discuss systems theory, the concept of differentiation, and how the mass media system produces the construction of reality.

Parsons and Luhmann's System Theory to Autopoiesis

Niklas Luhmann is not an entity from the world of mass media and journalism but a sociologist who tries to see the environment around him based on the system theory he put forward – but he still writes a book entitled Die Realitat der Massenmedien (1996)-. Luhmann's system theory is a criticism as well as a revision of the previous system theory put forward by Talcott Parsons. For Luhmann, systems theory is unique in responding to social phenomena that occur in society. Therefore, it is important in this paper to introduce the study of systems theory by Talcott Parsons (his predecessor) and Niklas Luhmann (his successor).

Talcott Parsons's system theory has the characteristic of a social order that is not coercive and also not a product of transactions by egocentric strategic actors, but is the result of a consensus of values that involves three components at once, namely society, culture, and personality. Culture is a dominant pattern of values and norms that structure the processes of social actions which is then better known as "functional structural system theory". The structure allows for the survival of social structures with differentiated functions within them. The main criticism of Talcott Parsons' theory is how the system maintains itself and assumptions about the stability of the system. This theory assumes that society will always be stagnant, not changing according to civilization, even though many processes such as conflict and social change often occur [4].

The function is understood as a result of the ability of a system to adapt to its environment. Through this ability, the sustainability of the system will be guaranteed. The concept of function is important for the dynamics and sustainability of a system. According to Parsons, for the survival of a system to be guaranteed, the four basic functions that he formulated in AGIL (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency) must be fulfilled. The adaptation function and goal attainment function emphasize the system's relationship with its external environment, while the integration and latency functions relate to the internal relationships between elements in a system [9].

In revising Talcott Parsons' systems theory, Niklas Luhmann made "minor changes" to the systems theory. Parsons' main idea of integration and social order "only" is complemented by the idea of conflict and social change. So integration and conflict, order and change, can be included in Luhmann's systems theory. If Parsons's system theory is called "functional structural systems theory", then Luhmann's system theory is called "structural functional systems theory", because 'functional' analysis gets priority over 'structural' analysis [4].

In Luhmann's systems theory, the concept of function undergoes a radically changing meaning. The function is not an art of causal relations, but an application of functional order. With this model, the existence of a social system is guaranteed to continue, not only through the fulfillment of its overall function but also through the fulfillment of equivalent functions [9].

A system, according to Luhmann, will initially be formed if it can solve certain problems. The essence of the problem in this context is the difference between the system and its environment (system differentiation) which forces the system to form a problem-solving structure to maintain its existence. With this model, the system does not only function adaptively but is structurally oriented towards its environment. Without the environment, the system cannot survive. The system has a mechanism to reduce complexity through the formation of structures so that the boundary between itself and its environment remains stable. The structure is no longer static, but very dynamic, effectively producing a problem-solving process [9].

Luhmann defines a system as a chain of events or human life that is connected. Systems are formed by distinguishing themselves from the environment of those events and operations that cannot be integrated into their internal structure. Every operation of a system (according to Luhmann every communication from and to the system) reproduces this boundary by embedding itself in a network of further operations, which at the same time

gains its own identity. Each system has its limitations, for example, the economic system, educational system, legal system, and so on. This system boundary is nothing but the type and concrete effort of the individual systems that form these boundaries. It is this collection of system boundaries that Luhmann later defines as the "environment".

In developing his systems theory for 30 years, Luhmann adopted the ideas of two biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the theory of autopoiesis. This theory departs from questions about the life of living organisms and their differences from inanimate objects. The answers and conclusions of the two biologists are that living systems of living things are based on the reproduction of the system itself. This reproductive system is called the autopoiesis system. This autopoiesis system is a system that runs repeatedly to reproduce its elements through the elements themselves [8].

Luhmann tries to find what is the basis of the social system. The Sociological Tradition itself presents two basic choices of social systems: between individuals or actions. But Luhmann rejects these two options because they do not support the autopoiesis system, because of that Luhmann provides a different basic element in the social system and that is communication (more precisely called the act of communication) [8]. Quoting from Niklas Luhmann who stated that communication is the basis of the social system. "Social systems use communications as their particular mode of autopoietic reproduction. Their elements are communications which are recursively produced and reproduced by a network of communications and which cannot exist outside of such a network."

The autopoiesis system which refers to production and reproduction within a system (communication) ultimately makes the social system a communication network that survives by communicating within its network. Communication can only survive as long as it communicates, in other words, the context of "communication" automatically enters the communication network which is considered a form of communication. Following Luhmann's famous saying, "Only communications can communicate."

Communication has always been a major factor that cannot be replaced with other elements in the system. Communication is a mechanism in the constitution of society as an autopoiesis system that processes according to conditions. Communication, which is considered a self-reproducing autopoiesis system, makes society a self-substitute order that can change itself through its system. Communication becomes the basic structure of society where the relationship between communication and society is always rotating: there is no communication without society and no society without communication. The purpose of communication is to form differences that can be aimed at further communication, establishing and providing stability within system boundaries, both within systems and between systems.

Luhmann in implementing the theory of social phenomena in society always relates this system theory to aspects of human life. In his way, Luhmann can enter an aspect of human life and explore it. As a sociologist, Luhmann is also known as the originator of "the theory of society" or the theory of society [1]. Society, according to Luhmann, is of course not just a community as a collection of individuals who live in an area. Rather, it is transformed into a general system that includes all systems in society through communication that is related to one another. Luhmann developed various theories of this society based on systems that live with society, such as the economy (the economics of society), law (the law of society), science (the science of society), art (the art of society), and religion. (the religion of society), politics (the politics of society), even society itself (the society of society), which was later collected into a major work, Social Systems: The Outline of a General Theory.

2. DIFFERENTIATION

The concept of differentiation is concurrent with the development of the systems theory discussed earlier. The concept of differentiation arises because the system will never become a single unit capable of answering all social problems in society. This concept of differentiation is the foundation that answers the many problems in several social subsystems so that the social system will reproduce its system; creating new social subsystems that are used to address environmental problems.

Many thinkers in the social sciences have contributed their thoughts on the concept of differentiation, such as Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann, and Alexander. They have their thoughts that are relevant to the development of the social system, especially the mass media system. But before seeing how this differentiation works in the mass media system, discussing the concept of differentiation itself will be an important sub-chapter for us to know.

Emile Durkheim in his book entitled The Division of Labor in Society, talks about the separation of professions as a kind of horizontal differentiation of society: Modern society has become increasingly complex due to divisions between social institutions specializing in certain functions. Durkheim's ideas stated that the increasing complexity of society requires the functional differentiation of social roles and institutions. Durkheim traced the development of modern relations

between the individual and society. The division of labor does not symbolize the disappearance of social morality but rather represents a new type of social morality [3].

In simpler societies, people do relatively similar jobs, such as farming, and they have the same experiences and consequently the same values. In contrast, in modern society, everyone has a different job. When different people are given various specialized tasks, they no longer have shared experiences. That diversity destroys the shared moral beliefs necessary for a society. As a result, people will not make social sacrifices in times of need. The main thesis of The Division of Labor Society is that modern society is not united by similarities among people who do essentially the same things. Rather, it is the division of labor itself that draws people together by forcing them to be interdependent on one another. Modern society is united by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others. This specialization includes not only individuals, but also groups, structures, and institutions [7].

We can see the media analysis with this Durkheim-style differentiation in how the environment breaks down the mass media system into smaller systems, such as the mass media organizational system (mass media corporation), and the mass media regulatory system (press council, press law, etc). Each subsystem in the mass media system has its actors who are bound by a code of ethics and professionalism, for example, the journalistic code of ethics is different from the broadcasting code of ethics.

Talcott Parsons defined differentiation as "the division of the unit or structure of a social system into two or more, or structures that differ in their characteristics and functional significance for the system," and described the process of social change in modern society as one where social function initially unite and then separate: politics, for example, is distinguished from religion and/from economics [3]. This then becomes a sign of the awareness of modern society. Society grows increasingly complex and each has its interests. The government's political system should be separated from the economic system because it is feared that the potential for evil will increase, for example, corruption.

Media analysis with differentiation from Talcott Parsons looks at it from the operational point of view of the media. The side of journalists as mass media entities should be separated from other corporate economic systems to reduce the potential for "envelope journalists". The mass media system should also be separated from the political economic system, especially from the influence of its owners so that they are not trapped in the use of mass media under certain conditions, thereby reducing the objectivity of the mass media.

Jeffrey C. Alexander in his article entitled The Mass Media in Systemic, Historical and Comparative Perspective, considers that society is considered "modern" if the mass media system is autonomous from other social systems. Alexander's analysis of the development of mass media in western society - the United States and France - considers that there is a process leading to mass media differentiation from other social institutions, such as political parties, the state, religion, and so on. The process that leads to this differentiation is a consequence of three main influences, namely the demand for more universal information faced by new social institutions in the form of advocacy journalism against the previous government order, the development of professional norms and self-regulation which lead to the development of journalism autonomy, and the degree of equality which increases in the culture of state society [3].

The last concept of differentiation was contributed by Niklas Luhmann who considered that the main feature of modern society is the process of increasing system differentiation as a way to deal with the complexity of its environment. Differentiation is "replication", within a system the difference between a system and its environment. That means that within a differentiated system, there are two kinds of environments: one environment that is common to all systems and a different internal environment for each system.

Differentiation within a system is a way of dealing with changes in the environment. Each system must maintain its boundaries to the environment, otherwise, it will be overwhelmed by the complexity of its environment. A surviving system means that the system must be able to deal with environmental variations. A differentiation process is a tool for increasing system complexity because each subsystem can create different relationships with other subsystems. The process allows for more variation within the system to respond to variations within the environment [7].

Luhmann's concept of differentiation in the mass media system is a long adaptation process that has been carried out by society and the social environment. Even though the mass media itself has lived quite a long time in human history, the system did not necessarily form as it is today. Many influences from other systems have shaped the mass media system to become (more) autonomous than before. The mass media system is often overlaid with the political and governmental systems, the implementation of which is that the mass media is an extension of the government in carrying out propaganda

to the public. On the other hand, the mass media system which mixes with the economic system makes the mass media a large corporation that seeks profit from the information it disseminates.

The theory of differentiation in general discusses the relationship between social parts of society. The relationship is not between each agent or group that has the same social interests. But more to how there is the differentiation of power or blurring of issues that are not even more significant social issues. The theory of differentiation brings us to an understanding in understanding the big differences in a media system, apart from the historical side which combines the media system with political (party) systems and social groups consisting of class, religion, ethnicity, and so on, as well as the relationships that arise due to other systems entering the connected space.

In studying the media, the theory of differentiation suggests that the powers that influence the mass media should be less and the implementation of differentiation be higher. The lack of power, in this case, government and political intervention, will allow the mass media to develop more optimally. Freedom of the press can be realized so that democracy will work well. Educating the public can also be carried out by media that is impartial to certain groups. The differentiation theory used in studying the mass media pays more attention to the relationship of the mass media as a system or institution. This relationship can be seen in any system that is around the mass media and what influence is generated by the system. Will it have a positive or negative effect on the development of media?

Mass media institutions themselves are often seen as an interesting comprehensive system. So many other systems want to play in this mass media system. Other systems that want to participate in the mass media system generally have the motive to gain power. This is because the mass media can create or create power based on pluralism in its way. So the differentiation that occurs in each of these systems is not clear. Interests in each system will overlap which can result in different coding from the mass media system and other systems.

One of the important points of the theory of differentiation in the mass media system is professionalization. Professionalization is considered the center of thought when talking about the mass media system. Because professionalization can be understood as a process of differentiation of the journalistic system from various other forms of work and social practice. Journalistic professionalization can clarify the differences in each coding system.

Professionalization, judging from the placement process for each profession/occupation, you will see fundamental differences in the operations of each system. For example, the journalistic code of ethics only applies to the world of journalism, as well as the code of ethics for other professions, it cannot simply be applied to every profession. The differentiation that arises in this professionalization seeks to answer the complexity of the system based on each profession. Thus, the mass media system maintains its system through self-imposed regulations (rational-legal authority).

3. MASS MEDIA AND REALITY CONSTRUCTION

At the beginning of the first subchapter, it was stated that even though Niklas Luhmann is not an entity originating from the world of mass media and journalism, he still writes books about the world of mass media and the construction of reality resulting from these mass media practices. As Luhmann's functional-structural system theory which has been explained along with its development for 30 years has become autopoiesis, this is the basis for exploring what is happening behind a mass media industry working in producing the construction of reality.

Luhmann still with his functional-structural system theory sees the mass media in work as having its system. And it is this system that then becomes the study of the phenomenon of the mass media industry. The system is not an entity, it is a set of relationships. The system in the mass media means that the mass media has a set of materials that carry out the process relations so that it works like a system.

Luhmann sees reality in mass media institutions consisting of their working patterns. The mass media will operate according to their media type; print which means to produce in the form of writing, graphics, and photos. And broadcasting which produces broadcast programs both on television and radio. Many communication processes run in the system including the preparation and following discussions that are present in this process. In the end, the process of information dissemination (spreading) by the mass media is only possible with the power of technology. This is what allows mass communication in the mass media, in other words, to be technically operational (Luhmann, 2000: 3).

The reality in the mass media is not always just a technical matter as discussed just now. In obtaining content, the mass media also acts as a researcher of reality in the environment. Mass media audiences who see the results of mass media "research" in the dissemination of their information will get a position as second-order observers where the first-order observer is the mass media itself. This means that the mass media audience will get reality from the mass media as the second form

of reality that occurs because the first reality obtained by the mass media experiences a construction of reality when it enters the area of the mass media. The foundation that allows for the construction of reality in the mass media is the existence of self-references and other references that are present in the mass media system. The mass media system distinguishes self-reference and other references within itself in the form of the construction of that reality or the results of information that is disseminated to the public. [6].

The existence of self-reference and other references (self-reference and other references) within the media system that makes the mass media the ability and its rights in determining what information, what kind, and how it will be disseminated. This is what in the end the mass media system does not stand alone, or this is precisely what the complexity of the mass media system looks like. Mass media self-reference is as it is known by the public as an information disseminator, the information provided can be used as a guide, does not choose any party in the selection and dissemination of information so that it creates bias, and does coverage (journalism) cover both sides. It is this self-reference that makes the media have its system and working environment. The presence of other references in the system creates interpenetration from other systems to the mass media system, for example, the political economic system of media ownership. Things like this will affect the media system in its work and (one of them) give rise to the construction of reality.

The theory of the autopoietic system also applies to the mass media system. Luhmann sees this based on the binary code that applies in the mass media. As an entity in disseminating information, the binary code in the mass media assesses and selects which data are still referred to as "information and non-information". The coding process in the mass media gives the mass media the right to determine which ones can still be informed to the public, and which ones can no longer be informed. Thus the iterative process of creating and getting rid of that information.

According to Luhmann, the functional element of mass media is information. For him, information cannot be repeated, information will change as "no longer information" when it reaches its goal. It is the mass media system that transforms information into no longer information, while at the same time growing the need for new information which will soon turn into no longer information when it is transformed. Thus the media system reproduces itself from elements that originate from itself. Binary code determines whether a material is an information or not information. In this case, the decision of the mass media to open or not open a case as

a public discourse will be the main determinant of the information element [9].

There is a reality within the mass media that is confronted with a wider environmental reality, accompanied by self-references and other references in the mass media system, then the selection process in the mass media that determines what is information and what is not, all of this leads to a process of the formation of the construction of reality within the mass media.

Luhmann himself says in his book that the problem of the construction of reality in the mass media is the main problem being studied (Luhmann, 2000: 76). Previously there were three categories in mass media content divided by Luhmann: news and in-depth reporting, advertising, entertainment. In these three categories, there is a reality construction that works each of these categories. Today, mass media consumption is increasing due to the increasing need for public information. However, the increasing level of consumption reduces public awareness to know the construction of reality in each category. In short, the public considers that what is in the mass media is a true part of their lives. In social reality (daily life), public assumptions say that the world is as it is, and the emergence of different opinions that occur is the result of different views, experiences, and 'subjective' memories.

Social reality does not stand alone without the presence of individuals, both inside and outside that reality. Social reality has meaning when the social reality is subjectively constructed and interpreted by other individuals to establish that reality objectively. Individuals construct social reality, and reconstruct it in the world of reality, establishing that reality is based on the subjectivity of other individuals in their social institutions [2].

As a product of social construction, this reality is both a subjective reality and an objective reality at the same time. In subjective reality, this reality concerns the meaning, interpretation, and results of the relationship between individuals and objects. Each individual has a different historical background, knowledge, and environment, which can result in different interpretations when seeing and dealing with objects. Conversely, reality also has an objective dimension, namely, something that is experienced is external, and is outside the individual.

The position of "social construction of mass media" is to correct the substance of weaknesses and complete the "social construction of reality", by placing all the advantages of mass media and the superior effects of "social construction of mass media" over "social construction of reality". However, the simultaneous process described does not work suddenly, but the formation of the process goes through several important

stages. From the social construction content of mass media, the birth process of mass media social construction goes through the following stages: the stage of preparing construction materials, the stage of distributing construction, the stage of constructing construction, and the stage of confirmation. This concept maps out how the "social construction of mass media" occurs in the realm of media institutions until finally the information is conveyed to the public. This process uses examples of advertising and news as mass media content that can be constructed along with the interests of the mass media as the basis for the need for mass media construction [2].

CONCLUSION

In the development of social science, especially regarding mass media, Luhmann is indeed not classified as a pioneer in thinking about mass media and the construction of this reality. Before he was born there was a community of social thinkers who lived in 1923 – Luhmann was born in 1929- named the Institute of Social Research (also called Frankfurt Schools or Frankfurt School). Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Mark Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Leo Lowenthal, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock are the main contributors in this community in producing a grand theory called critical theory/paradigm. The generation that stood out afterward was Jurgen Habermas with public sphere theory and Stuart Hall with cultural studies. Both this think tank and Niklas Luhmann are from Germany. With the development of social science and theory at that time, Germany was the country with the greatest contribution.

What Luhmann gave in his contribution to the world of science, especially social science, is an important work in seeing the phenomenon of this increasingly pluralistic society. Structural-functional systems theory, which is a revision of Parsons' structural-functional systems theory, is considered a comprehensive way of seeing how the environment is filled with social systems that go hand in hand, together but are different, each of these systems lives with its consensus and conflict. Each other cannot enter the system because it will only create chaos.

Both Frankfurt Schools and Niklas Luhmann are aware of the existence of reality formations/reality constructions formed by the mass media in creating information that will be disseminated to the public. Both realize that the media has its way of working, especially in producing its content. For critical thinkers, this is also based on the orientation of the mass media as an economic and business entity, not just a disseminator of information. For Luhmann, there is a process of differentiation and self-reference and other as well as a

system of autopoiesis that makes the mass media behave that way.

The media is not just a simple mechanism for disseminating information; The media is a complex organization that forms important social institutions society. The media are major players in ideological struggles and rivalries. Much of critical communication theory is concerned with the media because of the power of the media to propagate dominant ideologies and their power to express alternative and opposing ideologies. For some critical theorists, the media is part of a culture industry that creates symbols and images that can suppress small groups [5].

The construction of reality in the mass media cannot be understood as a set of facts but as the result of a certain view of the formation of reality. For critical theorists, for example, the actual reality is no longer possible due to interference from economic, social, and political groups. When the reality that has been mixed by several parties enters the territory of the mass media, then the reality is increasingly mixed into the construction of the mass media, say, such as media policy, media ownership, to discussions at the editorial level. In the end, mass media audiences witness the many layers of reality construction in their daily lives, but are dull in their knowledge of the reality that occurs in the environment in which the events take place.

The meaning of this construction is a potential study of the progress of science, especially in media studies. Niklas Luhmann's systems theory can see that there is an irregularity in a system when there is the interpenetration of the surrounding systems and this is the reason for the conflict between the systems. If the system can adapt to the conflict, the system will automatically reproduce itself based on its elements to create a new system that is better at dealing with the complexity of its environment, including the mass media system.

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